



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
Garey Bies
1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT
COMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS AND THE COURTS

**Written Testimony of Representative Garey Bies
Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice
Assembly Bill 737 – Crime Alert Network**

Fellow Committee members, I appreciate the opportunity to submit my testimony in support of Assembly Bill 737, relating to the creation of an Integrated Crime Alert Network. As you know, I have been asked by Attorney General Van Hollen to be the lead author of this legislation in the Assembly and I am here today speaking in that capacity.

Assembly Bill 737 is about using the power of information to prevent crime and apprehend criminals. This legislation establishes an information network to allow the rapid distribution of information about criminal activity to participating businesses and members of the community.

As a former law enforcement officer, I am well aware of the important role timely and accurate information plays in combating crime. The more information can be utilized, the better the chance for law enforcement to apprehend the criminals responsible as well as prevent those criminals from perpetrating further crimes. Information is a powerful crime-fighting tool and it is in our best interest to utilize information as much as possible. The Crime Alert Network will be another tool.

It should also be noted that this type of alert network has been proven to work. The Integrated Crime Alert Network is similar in its infrastructure to the Amber Alert Network, with which we are all familiar. The Amber Alert Network has proven its effectiveness. In addition, Attorney General Van Hollen has based this Crime Alert Network on a system currently in operation in Minnesota that has also proven effective. This is a system that can be developed here in Wisconsin and will work.

I know that it has been pointed out already, but given the fiscal condition of our state, this legislation requires no expenditure of GPR dollars and will be funded from the fee levied upon participating recipients. I think that the anticipated fee of \$1 per month is very reasonable.

In conclusion, I just want to reiterate that the Crime Alert Network is about utilizing information to combat crime. This is legislation worthy of our support and I respectfully request your support of AB 737 in committee. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.

First for Wisconsin!

Capitol: P.O. 8952, Madison, WI 53708-8952 • (608) 266-5350 • Fax: (608) 282-3601
Toll-Free: (888) 482-0001 • Rep.Bies@legis.state.wi.us

Home: 2590 Settlement Road, Sister Bay, WI 54234 • (920) 854-2811



**STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

**J.B. VAN HOLLEN
ATTORNEY GENERAL**

**Raymond P. Taffora
Deputy Attorney General**

114 East, State Capitol
P.O. Box 7857
Madison, WI 53707-7857
608/266-1221
TTY 1-800-947-3529

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL J.B. VAN HOLLEN IN SUPPORT OF
AB-737**

**Assembly Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday, January 30, 2008**

Chairman Kleefisch, members of the Committee on Criminal Justice, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Assembly Bill 737. This bill would enable us to implement the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network, a new statewide public safety initiative that we have developed at the Department of Justice.

At the Department of Justice, we exist to assist local law enforcement in our mutual mission to fight crime and enhance public safety. We do this in many ways. One way that we do this is by sharing information. Daily, the Wisconsin Statewide Information Center analyzes and disseminates to the hundreds of law enforcement agencies throughout law enforcement information about unique criminal activity or missing children. By increasing the number of law enforcement aware of a particular criminal trend or enterprise, we increase our chances of capturing suspects or preventing a crime before it occurs. Better information to more law enforcement about criminal activity helps them protect all of us from crime.

The Wisconsin Crime Alert Network takes the concept of electronic information sharing a step further: to those private entities affected by crime on a regular basis. By providing appropriate information to private citizens about criminal activity, law enforcement increases its eyes and ears, resulting in more suspects being caught and more missing children being recovered.

Here's how it will work. Law enforcement trained by the Department of Justice to use the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network would send out messages to participating businesses and members of the community about criminal activity, criminal trends, or missing persons. By using a drop down menu, those messages can be distributed to specific geographic regions—or even statewide—and specify the type of private entity to receive the message. Participants and law enforcement would then receive an email or fax with the message. Alerted and armed with information, participants can be on the lookout for unusual behavior or identified suspects. This will help them protect themselves—and help them alert law enforcement.

The concept of law enforcement sharing information about criminal activity with affected members of the local community is not new. What is new is the capability to efficiently transmit information to different regions throughout the state so that members of all potentially affected communities. And we should take advantage of that capability.

Take for example a series of OxyContin thefts from pharmacies in Southeastern Wisconsin. An alert could be sent out by the responding local law enforcement agency to pharmacies in the region who are members of the network. The alerts could carry images from security cameras or descriptions of suspects, allowing pharmacies to be on the lookout for the suspects. By reporting suspicious activity to police, they can protect themselves, their inventory, and ultimately those who might become hooked on the stolen prescription drugs that would have been otherwise distributed at a local high school. Or take an example of a scrap metal theft in Sister Bay. It isn't enough to notify the community in Door County that a scrap metal theft has occurred. The thief may go elsewhere to liquidate his stolen goods. By notifying the participating businesses that purchase and process scrap metal in Milwaukee, they can be on the lookout for the stolen goods described in a crime alert. When the thief attempts to sell to them, law enforcement can be contacted.

Sometimes statewide distribution will be appropriate. Take for example an abducted child. An alert containing pictures of the child could be sent throughout the network, and those on the lookout can report sightings to law enforcement. It was this very scenario that alerted me to how truly life saving a statewide crime alert network could be. Last year, the Department of Justice issued an amber alert. It was believed the abductor was taking the children north or northwest. Before the missing children could be recovered in Wisconsin, their abductor had taken them to Minnesota. Thankfully, Minnesota has a crime alert network similar to the one I am endorsing today. Information contained in the Wisconsin amber alert was transmitted over Minnesota's network. A participating hotel received the alert, and hotel staff recognized the suspect from the crime alert message. They contacted area law enforcement, and the children were recovered safely.

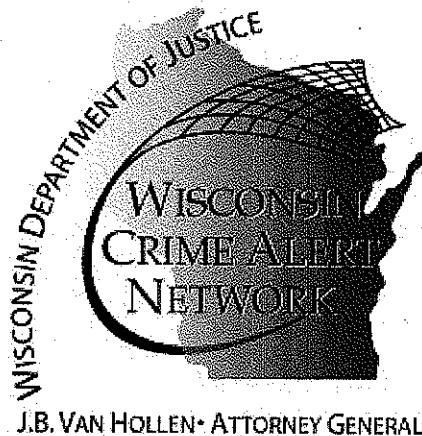
Assembly Bill 737 authorizes the creation of the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network. Creation of the system will not require any general revenue. It authorizes the Department of Justice to charge a fee to those private entities that choose to participate. This fee should be nominal. In Minnesota, where a similar network has been in existence for over 12 years, over 10,000 businesses are members and pay just \$12 a year to participate. One dollar per month to assist law enforcement in the apprehension of suspects—and to make their businesses and communities safer. Linking law enforcement with businesses creates a web of safety that each of our communities deserve.

I strongly believe in this initiative. If this legislation is enacted and we are permitted to implement this program, then I will pledge Department of Justice discretionary settlement funds to get the program off the ground while we sign up members. Once launched, I believe businesses will participate, and do so in broad numbers. Every business group I or my staff have met with has indicated strong support and a belief that many of their members would enthusiastically participate. That makes sense. Businesses have an intrinsic interest in participating. Not only can they help protect their staff and their inventory by participating, not only are many businesses throughout the state interested in the safety of their communities, but

safer streets enhances business. 10,000 businesses participate in a Minnesota's similar program. It should never be forgotten that reducing crime and enhancing public safety is a critical component of healthy local economies.

Chairman Kleefisch and members, this program has the ability to make each and every one of your districts safer. Increasing the eyes and ears of law enforcement is a major step to make all of our communities safer.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



What is it?

- It is Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen's initiative to provide local law enforcement with the ability to quickly alert the business community and the general public about a crime trend or a suspect that may affect them or their business. Businesses with information about those criminal activities can report those activities to local law enforcement.

How does it work?

- DOJ trained law enforcement would send out messages to participating businesses and members of the community using electronic communications that could be selected by region or type of business. For example, in the event of a series of OxyContin thefts from pharmacies in Southeastern Wisconsin, an alert could be sent out by each responding agency to pharmacies in the region who are members.

What is the public benefit?

- By providing information to the business community about criminal activity, law enforcement increases its eyes and ears, more suspects are caught, more runaways are recovered. Businesses have an interest in participating because these alerts can be targeted to criminal activity that affects their particular businesses or their areas. Safer streets and preventing theft enhances business as well as promotes public safety.

Isn't there a concern that sensitive information about ongoing law enforcement investigations will be disclosed to the public?

- No. All entries into the system for distribution to businesses will be by law enforcement trained on the system and familiar with these sensitivities.

Is there the infrastructure for this?

- Communication would be through a private entity contractor to email and blast faxes to participating businesses and members of the public. The Department of Justice already has relationships with contractors who have built essential capabilities by participating in Amber backups and Missing Endangered Alerts. As importantly, this model has been developed and tested. Attorney General Van Hollen's plan is based on a Minnesota program that has been providing similar services for more than 10 years. Though infrastructure would need to be built here, it can be easily adapted based on the Minnesota model.

Who will pay for this?

- Ongoing annual costs are expected to be approximately \$125,000/year. These costs will be paid for by charging private members, who participate voluntarily, an annual fee. In Minnesota, a slightly smaller state by population, annual fees to business are \$12 per year and there are currently over 10,000 members. Attorney General Van Hollen has pledged to fund start-up costs through his discretionary settlement account. Van Hollen is also willing to use the account to cover shortfalls during the initial start-up period while membership grows.

What do we need from the legislature?

- To get the program operational, we will need a law expressly authorizing the ability to charge participating business entities a fee to cover the costs of the program. Only users who voluntarily participate would pay under Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen's plan. There would be no need for general tax revenue. Representative Garey Bies and Senator Jeffrey Plale are co-sponsoring legislation (2007 AB 737) that would authorize Attorney General Van Hollen to implement the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network.